

| Rachel | The people of Israel |
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| Brings forth a son on the way to Ephrath | Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem of Judea |
| Calls him 'the son of my sorrow' | Jesus Christ rejected of his own generation |
| Hard labour | Israel's affliction by the Gentiles |
| Dies | Faithless Israel to die before she becomes a great nation |
| Jacob calls his son 'the son of the right hand' | Israel accepts Jesus as Messiah |
| Jacob spreads his tent beyond the tower of Edar | Israel becomes a great nation. The kingdom comes to the tower of the flock |

his own received him not" (Jno. 1:11). That faithless generation failed to recognise that Jesus was indeed the Son of God's right hand.

But then Rachel died while in travail. It was only after this that Jacob was able to spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar. The significance of this is that, before the children of Israel can become the great and mighty nation promised to Abraham, they themselves must suffer travail and their faithlessness has effectively to be put to death. Only when, in the extremity of their suffering, they learn to turn to God in faith and accept Jesus as their Messiah, the Son of the right hand, will the former dominion come to the daughter

of Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ will "restore again the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6).

Be in pain and labour to bring forth

Having spoken of the coming of the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem, Micah continues to declare that Israel's travail must come first: "Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, *and thou shalt go even to*

Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies" (4:9,10).

Here was the beginning of the process of Israel's travail. They were going to be taken captive into Babylon—a remarkable prediction for Micah to make at a time when Babylon had not yet reached its ascendancy. This was to be the beginning of a refining and purifying process that will be completed only in the latter days when faithless Israel dies in the furnace of affliction and God's people finally turn to him in faith and obedience. In that day they will look upon him whom they have pierced, and will mourn for him.

(To be continued)

Exposition

Titus and Crete

Malcolm Edwards

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (Tit. 1:5).

THE ABOVE quotation from the Apostle Paul's letter to Titus hardly reveals the daunting task that would have confronted the younger man when he first arrived in the island of Crete, not only from the ecclesial problems that seemed rife there, but also from the forbidding landscape itself.

On approaching the airport at Heraklion from above, one is immediately impressed by the mountainous terrain that stretches from coast to coast.

In the hinterland the main roads are few, and mostly north to south across the island. In the time of Titus these would have been little more than dangerous tracks. From the phrase "every city" in the above passage we may deduce that there were at least three ecclesias in the island, and perhaps more.

**The “Royal Road”
at Knossos, said by
some to be the oldest
road in Europe. Titus
may have walked this
road in his travels
around the island.**

Picture: HolyLandPhotos.org



Jewish presence in Crete

We know from Acts 2:11 that there were many Jews living in Crete at that period. This is not surprising, since (as was the case with mainland Greece) wherever there were major ports in the Mediterranean area Jewish communities grew and profited from the maritime trade. So, although Crete was not without many inland cities, it seems more likely that the ecclesias would have been confined to the seaports around the island, the major ones being Cydonia and Knossos on the north coast (the latter possibly being today’s Heraklion), and Phenice, or Phoenix, on the southern coast. Titus would most likely have visited these ecclesias by sea. We recall that, during his voyage to Rome, Paul’s ship called at Fair Havens, which had poor anchorage. It was as they were heading for better conditions at Phenice that the ship was diverted to the southwest by the Euroclydon storm, to be wrecked at Miletus.

Titus was to visit each new ecclesia and appoint elders, or bishops, based on the qualifications Paul had given in his letter:

“if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine

both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (1:6-9).

To be called by Paul “mine own son after the common faith” (v. 4) suggests Titus was a young man. This means he was selecting men much older than himself but having the right qualifications and temperament to cope with serious ecclesial problems, especially those caused by Judaisers:

“For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (vv. 10-14).

Supporting Gentile converts

The reference to Cretians suggests that there were also Gentile converts in these communities, which would further complicate the difficulties.

This was a tall order for the young man Titus! What were his own qualifications for such a task?

His name suggests that he was a converted Gentile (confirmed by his being called a “Greek” in Galatians 2:3), and it is likely he was also uncircumcised. This rules out his being a converted proselyte.



The Basilica of Ayios Titos at Gortyna. According to tradition, Titus was martyred here. This church dates to the seventh century A.D.

Picture: HolyLandPhotos.org

Titus 1:4 suggests he had been converted by Paul himself, while Galatians 2:1 informs us that he was with Paul at Jerusalem with Barnabas. He was also with Paul for some considerable time afterwards (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:6; 8:23). These passages, and a further five in 2 Corinthians, indicate that Titus was well known to the members at Corinth; to be called by Paul “my partner and fellow-helper” was praise enough and a testimony to his abilities.

Thus Titus was ably qualified for the work in Crete; in fact, the words “left I thee at Crete” suggest strongly that he and Paul had been there together on some previous occasion.

Welcome help for Titus

Nevertheless, both Titus and the newly elected elders were to receive some extra, and most valuable, help:

“When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter” (3:12).

It seems that Artemas and Tychicus were to be sent not only as helpers, but to relieve Titus, to allow him to visit Paul at Nicopolis, which was on the western part of the Greek peninsula.

Two other extremely competent helpers were also spending time in the island:

“Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them” (v. 13).

From Acts 18:24 we know that Apollos was “mighty in the scriptures”; although nothing else is said of Zenas, his being a “lawyer” can only mean that he too was well-versed in Mosaic teaching.

We can imagine how crucial would be the contribution by these other two brethren in solving the many problems in Crete, particularly against the Judaizing factions.

Sadly, we have no record of the outcome of their efforts, or even whether Titus ever returned, or how long those few ecclesias lasted. Like most of the others in the area, it seems unlikely that they survived longer than to the end of the first century.

History tells that, after the time of Constantine, the inland city of Gortyna became the largest Christian centre in Crete. Typically of Christianity of that period, much is made of Titus, and it is there that the Basilica of Ayios Titos stood and was dedicated to Saint Titus, called the first Christian bishop in Crete.

Eventually Crete was conquered by Arabs, and much later by Ottomans, before it finally became part of Greece.

We are grateful for that precious narrow window in history when Titus and others went to Crete as missionaries with the apostolic blessing and faced many unrecorded trials, so that we, some 2,000 years afterwards, might benefit from the wonderful legacy of Paul’s personal epistle to Titus.